

American Decency Association

PO Box 202, Fremont, MI 49412 231-924-4050 www.americandecency.org

Encouraging Christians to guard their hearts

April 2017

Three Questions to Ask Before Watching a Movie

By: Jonathan Parnell
DesiringGod.org



It's never been easier to watch movies, and lots of them. ...

And let's face it, they're not all good movies. In fact, many of them are bad. And I mean bad in every sense — poor storylines, debaucherous scenes, shaky acting — there are plenty of ways it could go wrong. Which means, there are plenty of ways to ruin your evening by watching a movie. Therefore, we should think carefully before devoting hours of our lives to the screen, whether at home or in a theater. So, [in hopes of more thoughtful entertainment, here are three questions a Christian might ask before watching a movie.](#)

1. Should I really watch this movie?

Seriously. Don't assume you've already answered this question because you want to watch a movie. Back up and think honestly. Why are you interested in this movie? What is this movie about? How do you know that's what the movie is about? What piqued your interest in it? This sort of interrogation is simple permission to play. And we shouldn't let up so easily. [Don't be duped by the rating or the trailer. Those are both marketing tools that are not trying to talk you out of watching.](#) Read some reviews. See what other people are saying about it. And of course, set a standard, which won't be the same for everyone. Without getting into prescriptions here, consider two aspects for how you discern that standard.

First, make it a reasonable benchmark that you can sustain. Which means, don't make overly audacious goals built on bad logic. Consider whether your movie standard, if applied to the

Bible, would bar you from reading important portions of the Old Testament. And, to be sure, [don't think that biblical narratives like David and Bathsheba, or Ehud the assassin, mean it's okay for us to watch similar scenes on screen.](#) Be critical and sober about what you say is good to watch.

Second, how you discern a movie standard is largely [determined by your integrity.](#) Some movies should be out of the question, and for those on the bubble, we know best how certain things affect us. We know where we are weak. And if you are unsure, I think it's safe to say that if you find yourself repeatedly stumbling over the same sort of scene, then it means you should avoid it. We just know, if we're like most people, we shouldn't watch everything put before us. **Sacrificing our serenity of mind — or mental purity — is not worth a few minutes of supposed entertainment.** We can still understand a story even if someone stronger has to fill in the gaps we can't handle.

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2. Where are the true and false depictions of reality?

This actually starts with the concession: this movie will have true and false depictions of reality. Then we ask, so where are they?

We should be shrewd here. Oftentimes the most twisted depictions of reality are in the PG flicks, and worse, the feel-good movies that present a dangerously shallow picture of romance. **Letting our guard down on these romantic comedies is partly responsible for the mass confusion today when it comes to dating and relationships.** Unless we watch these cheesiest of movies with a critical eye, we may simply be inviting Hollywood to instruct us on what love is. Look for what's false and expose it, at least in your own mind. Work at recognizing the garbage even in the prettiest packages.

And also, be able to see the good — because most of the time, even in the darkest of movies, something true is being said about the world. ...

Basically, we want to watch movies with an eye

for the true, the honorable, the just, pure, lovely, and commendable. Heeding Paul's instructions in Philippians 4:8, we should "think about these things" — which doesn't mean we retreat from the world and handcuff ourselves to the idea of truth, but that we go out into God's created world and look for the truth that's there — especially when we are watching a movie.

3. What kind of hero does this movie really need?

... "What if we let the message of the movie point us to the bigger and better story that is actually real life?"

In the same way, every movie will have its hero. There will be a protagonist — the character that we are supposed to root for, the one who we consider better than ourselves just enough to want to be like him, at least in some ways. And, in most cases, this character won't line up perfectly with the true and better Hero.

So, what if we asked, when this hero is put forward, how the true and better Hero would act? Other than this or that flaw,

how would he be perfect? No Achilles' heel to work around. No foible to tolerate. **How would Jesus be in this movie? How could the good ending be even better?**

What if we let the message of the movie point us to the bigger and better story that is actually real life? The one where the writer enters the script and assumes the guilt of his characters, suffering in their place and defeating their greatest foe, and only then reigns as the unseen King through the simple acts of his former-fiends-now-turned-friends until the day when everyone and everything will see him as he is, when justice is executed and mercy consummates the creation of a whole new world where pain is eternally absent and joy is eternally present.

Christian, this is our story — the true story. And if we are going to lend our mind to a movie, let us walk away with a greater grasp of what really is.

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